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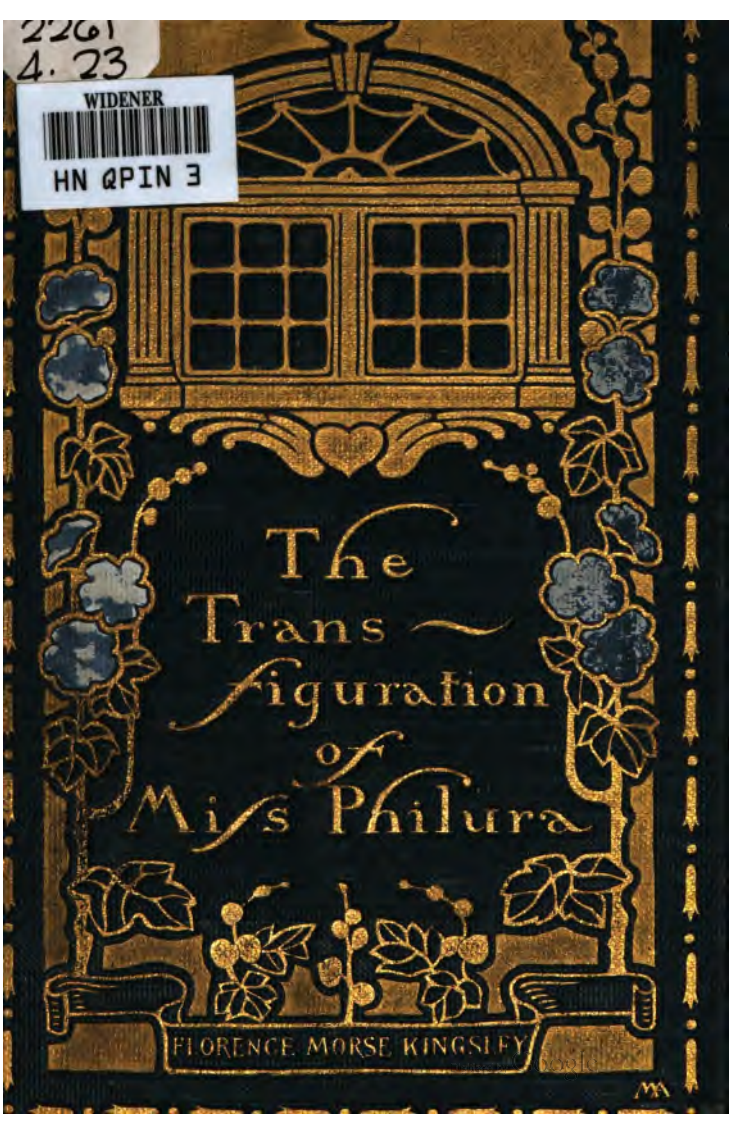

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The Transfiguration of Miss Philura

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"MRS. SMART'S THEME WAS
THOUGHT FORCES AND THE INFINITE"

[See page 18]

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[illegible] TRANSFORMATION

OF

MISS PHLURA

FL[illegible]

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THE TRANSFIGURATION OF MISS PHILURA

By

FLORENCE MORSE KINGSLEY

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
NEW YORK AND LONDON
1901

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CHAPTER ONE

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MISS PHILURA RICE tied her faded bonnet-strings under her faded chin with hands that trembled a little; then she leaned forward and gazed anxiously at the reflection which confronted her. A somewhat pinched and wistful face it was, with large, light-lashed blue eyes, arched over with a mere pretense at eyebrows. More than once in her twenties

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Miss Philura had ventured to eke out this scanty provision of Nature with a modicum of burned match stealthily applied in the privacy of her virgin chamber. But the twenties, with their attendant dreams and follies, were definitely past; just how long past no one knew exactly — Miss Philura never informed the curious on this point.

As for the insufficient eyebrows, they symbolized, as it were, a meagre and restricted life, vaguely acknowledged as

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the dispensation of an obscurely hostile but consistent Providence; a Providence far too awful and exalted—as well as hostile—to interest itself benignantly in so small and neutral a personality as stared back at her from the large, dim mirror of Cousin Maria Van Deuser's third-story back bedroom. Not that Miss Philura ever admitted such dubious thoughts to the select circle of her conscious reflections; more years ago than she cared to count she had grap-

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pled with her discontent, had thrust it resolutely out of sight, and on the top of it she had planted a big stone marked Resignation. Nevertheless, at times the stone heaved and trembled ominously.

At sound of a brisk tap at her chamber door the lady turned with a guilty start to find the fresh-colored, impertinent face of the French maid obtruding itself into the room.

"Ze madame waits," an-

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nounced this individual, and with a coldly comprehensive eye swept the small figure from head to foot.

"Yes, yes, my dear, I am quite ready—I am coming at once!" faltered Miss Philura, with a propitiatory smile, and more than ever painfully aware that the skirt of her best black gown was irremediably short and scant, that her waist was too flat, her shoulders too sloping, her complexion faded, her forehead wrinkled, and her bonnet unbecoming.

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As she stepped uncertainly down the dark, narrow stairway she rebuked herself severely for these vain and worldly thoughts. "To be a church member, in good and regular standing, and a useful member of society," she assured herself strenuously, "should be and *is* sufficient for me."

Ten minutes later, Miss Philura, looking smaller and more insignificant than usual, was seated in the carriage opposite Mrs. J. Mortimer

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Van Deuser — a large, heavily upholstered lady of majestic deportment, paying diligent heed to the words of wisdom which fell from the lips of her hostess and kinswoman.

"During your short stay in Boston," that lady was remarking impressively, "you will, of course, wish to avail yourself of those means of culture and advancement so sadly lacking in your own environment. This, my dear Philura, is pre-eminently the era of progressive thought. We can have at

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best, I fear, but a faint conception of the degree to which mankind will be able, in the years of the coming century, to shake off the gross and material limitations of sense."

Mrs. Van Deuser paused to settle her sables preliminary to recognizing with an expansive smile an acquaintance who flashed by them in a victoria; after which she adjusted the diamonds in her large, pink ears, and proceeded with unctuous tranquillity. "On this occasion, my dear Philura,

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you will have the pleasure of listening to an address by Mrs. B. Isabelle Smart, one of our most advanced thinkers along this line. You will, I trust, be able to derive from her words aliment which will influence the entire trend of your individual experience."

"Where—in what place will the lady speak—I mean, will it be in the church?" ventured Miss Philura in a depressed whisper. She sighed apprehensively as she glanced down at the tips of her shabby gloves.

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"The lecture will take place in the drawing-room of the Woman's Ontological Club," responded Mrs. Van Deuser, adding with austere sweetness of tone: "The club deals exclusively with those conceptions or principles which lie at the base of all phenomena; including being, reality, substance, time, space, motion, change, identity, difference, and cause—in a word, my dear Philura, with ultimate metaphysical philosophy." A majestic and conclusive sweep

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of a perfectly gloved hand suggested infinity and reduced Miss Philura into shrinking silence.

When Mrs. B. Isabelle Smart began to speak she became almost directly aware of a small, wistful face, with faded blue eyes and a shabby, unbecoming bonnet, which, surrounded as it was on all sides by tossing plumes, rich velvets and sparkling gems, with their accompaniments of full-fleshed,

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patrician countenances, took to itself a look of positive distinction. Mrs. Smart's theme, as announced by the President of the Ontological Club, was Thought Forces and the Infinite, a somewhat formidable-sounding subject, but one which the pale, slight, plainly dressed but singularly bright-eyed lady, put forward as the speaker of the afternoon, showed no hesitancy in attacking.

Before three minutes had passed Miss Philura Rice had

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forgotten that such things as shabby gloves, ill-fitting gowns, unbecoming bonnets and superfluous birthdays existed. In ten minutes more she was leaning forward in breathless attention, the faded eyes aglow, the unbecoming bonnet pushed back from a face more wistful than ever, but flushed with a joyful excitement.

"This unseen Good hems us about on every side," the speaker was saying, with a

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comprehensive sweep of her capable-looking hands. "It presses upon us, more limitless, more inexhaustible, more free than the air that we breathe! Out of it *every* need, *every* want, *every* yearning of humanity can be, must be, supplied. To you, who have hitherto led starved lives, hungering, longing for the good things which you believe a distant and indifferent God has denied you — to you I declare that in this encircling, ever-present, invisible, exhaustless Benefi-

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cence is already provided a lavish abundance of everything which you can possibly want or think! Nay, desire itself is but God—Good—Love, knocking at the door of your consciousness. It is impossible for you to desire anything that is not already your own! It only remains for you to bring the invisible into visibility—to take of the everlasting substance what you will!

"And how must you do this? Ask, and *believe that you have!* You have asked many

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times, perhaps, and have failed to receive. Why? You have failed to *believe*. Ask, then, for what you will! Ask, and at once return thanks for what you have asked! In the asking and *believing* is the thing itself made manifest. Declare that it is yours! Expect it! Believe it! Hold to it without wavering — no matter how empty your hands may seem! *It is yours*, and God's infinite creation shall lapse into nothingness; His stars shall fall from high Heaven like with-

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ered leaves sooner than that you shall fail to obtain all that you have asked!"

When, at the close of the lecture, Mrs. B. Isabelle Smart became the center of a polite yet insistent crush of satins, velvets and broadcloths, permeated by an aroma of violets and a gentle hum of delicate flattery, she was aware of a timid hand upon her arm, and turned to look into the small, eager face under the unfashionable bonnet.

"You—you meant religious

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gifts, did you not?" faltered the faint, discouraged voice; "faith, hope and—and—the —the being resigned to God's will, and—and endeavoring to bear the cross with patience."

"I meant *everything* that *you* want," answered the bright-eyed one with deliberate emphasis, the bright eyes softening as they took in more completely the pinched outlines and the eager child's look

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shining from out the worn and faded woman's face.

"But—but there is so much! I—I never had anything that I really wanted—things, you know, that one could hardly mention in one's prayers."

"Have them now. Have them all. God is all. All is God. You are God's. God is yours!"

Then the billowing surges of silk and velvet swept the small, inquiring face into the background with the accus-

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tomed ease and relentlessness of billowing surges.

Having partaken copiously of certain "material beliefs" consisting of salads and sandwiches, accompanied by divers cups of strong coffee, Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Deuser had become pleasantly flushed and expansive. "A most unique, comprehensive and uplifting view of our spiritual environment," she remarked to Miss Philura when the two ladies found themselves on their homeward way. Her best soci-

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ety smile still lingered blandly about the curves and creases of her stolid, high-colored visage; the dying violets on her massive satin bosom gave forth their sweetest parting breath.

The little lady on the front seat of the carriage sat very erect; red spots glowed upon her faded cheeks. "I think," she said tremulously, "that it was just — wonderful! I — I am so very happy to have heard it. Thank you a thousand times, dear Cousin Maria, for taking me."

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Mrs. Van Deuser raised her gold-rimmed glasses and settled them under arching brows, while the society smile faded quite away. "Of course," she said coldly, "one should make due and proper allowance for facts — as they exist. And also — er — consider above all what interpretation is best suited to one's individual station in life. Truth, my dear Philura, adapts itself freely to the needs of the poor and lowly as well as to the demands of those upon whom

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devolve the higher responsibilities of wealth and position; our dear Master Himself spoke of the poor as always with us, you will remember. A lowly but pious life, passed in humble recognition of God's chastening providence, is doubtless good and proper for many worthy persons."

Miss Philura's blue eyes flashed rebelliously for perhaps the first time in uncounted years. She made no answer.

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As for the long and presumably instructive homily on the duties and prerogatives of the lowly, lasting quite up to the moment when the carriage stopped before the door of Mrs. Van Deuser's residence, it fell upon ears which heard not. Indeed, her next remark was so entirely irrelevant that her august kinswoman stared in displeased amazement. "I am going to purchase some—some necessaries to-morrow, Cousin Maria; I should like Fifine to go with me."

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Miss Philura acknowledged to herself, with a truthfulness which she felt to be almost brazen, that her uppermost yearnings were of a wholly mundane character.

During a busy and joyous evening she endeavored to formulate these thronging desires; by bedtime she had even ventured — with the aid of a stubbed lead-pencil — to indite the most immediate and urgent of these wants as they knocked at the door of her consciousness. The list, hidden guiltily

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away in the depths of her shabby purse, read something as follows:

"I wish to be beautiful and admired. I want two new dresses; a hat with plumes, and a silk petticoat that rustles. I want some new kid gloves and a feather boa (a long one made of ostrich feathers). I wish ——" The small, blunt pencil had been lifted in air for the space of three minutes before it again descended; then, with cheeks that burned, Miss Philura had written the

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fateful words: "I wish to have a lover and to be married."

"There, I have done it!" she said to herself, her little fingers trembling with agitation. "He must already exist in the encircling Good. He is mine. I am engaged to be married at this very moment!"

To lay this singular memorandum before her Maker appeared to Miss Philura little short of sacrilegious; but the thought of the mysterious Abundance of which the seeress had spoken, urging itself,

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as it were, upon her acceptance, encouraged her. She arose from her evening orisons with a glowing face. "I have asked," she said aloud, "and I *believe* I shall have."

Mademoiselle Fifine passed a very enjoyable morning with Miss Philura. To choose, to purchase, and above all to transform the ugly into the beautiful, filled the French woman's breast with enthusiasm. Her glance, as it rested

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upon her companion's face and figure, was no longer coldly critical, but cordially appreciative. "Ze madame," she declared, showing her white teeth in a pleasant smile, "has very many advantage. *Voilà*, ze hair — *c'est admirable*, as any one may perceive! Pardon, while for one little minute I arrange! Ah — *mon dieu!* Regard ze difference!"

The two were at this moment in a certain millinery shop conducted by a discreet and agreeable compatriot of

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Fifine's. This individual now produced a modest hat of black, garnished with plumes, which, set lightly on the loosened bands of golden-brown hair, completed the effect "*délicieusement!*" declared the French women in chorus.

With a beating heart Miss Philura stared into the mirror at her changed reflection. "It is quite—quite true!" she said aloud. "It is all true."

Fifine and the milliner exchanged delighted shrugs and grimaces. In truth, the small,

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erect figure, in its perfectly fitting gown, bore no resemblance to the plain, elderly Miss Philura of yesterday. As for the face beneath the nodding plumes, it was actually radiant — transfigured — with joy and hope.

Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Deuser regarded the apparition which greeted her at luncheon with open disapproval. This new Miss Philura, with the prettily flushed cheeks, the bright eyes, the fluff of waving hair, and — yes, actually a knot

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of fragrant violets at her breast, had given her an unpleasant shock of surprise. "I am sure I hope you can *afford* all this," was her comment, with a deliberate adjustment of eyebrows and glasses calculated to add mordant point and emphasis to her words.

"Oh, yes," replied Miss Philura tranquilly, but with heightened color; "I can afford whatever I like now."

Mrs. Van Deuser stared hard at her guest. She found herself actually hesitating be-

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fore Philura Rice. Then she drew her massive figure to its full height, and again bent the compelling light of her gold-rimmed glasses full upon the small person of her kinswoman. "What—er—I do not understand," she began lamely. "*Where* did you obtain the money for all this!"

Miss Philura raised her eyebrows ever so little—somehow they seemed to suit the clear blue eyes admirably today.

"The money?" she repeated,

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in a tone of surprise. "Why, out of the bank, of course."

Upon the fact that she had drawn out and expended in a single morning nearly the whole of the modest sum commonly made to supply her meager living for six months Miss Philura bestowed but a single thought. "In the all-encircling Good," she said to herself serenely, "there is plenty of money for me; why, then, should I not spend this?"

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CHAPTER TWO

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THE village of Innisfield was treated to a singular surprise on the Sunday morning following, when Miss Philura Rice, newly returned from her annual visit to Boston, walked down the aisle to her accustomed place in the singers' seat. Whispered comment and surmise flew from pew to pew, sandwiched irreverently between hymn, prayer and

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sermon. Indeed, the last-mentioned portion of the service, being of unusual length and dullness, was utilized by the female members of the congregation in making a minute inventory of the amazing changes which had taken place in the familiar figure of their townswoman.

"Philury's had money left her, I shouldn't wonder"; "Her Cousin Van Deuser's been fixin' her up"; "She's a-goin' to be married!" were some of the opinions, wholly

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at variance with the text of the discourse, which found their way from mouth to mouth.

Miss Electa Pratt attached herself with decision to her friend, Miss Rice, directly the service was at an end. "I'm just *dying* to hear all about it!" she exclaimed, with a fond pressure of the arm linked within her own—this after the two ladies had extricated themselves from the circle of curious and critical faces at the church door.

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Miss Philura surveyed the speaker with meditative eyes; it seemed to her that Miss Pratt was curiously altered since she had seen her last.

"*Have* you had a fortune left you?" went on her inquisitor, blinking enviously at the nodding plumes which shaded Miss Philura's blue eyes. "Everybody *says* you have; and that you are going to get married soon. I'm sure you'll tell *me* everything!"

Miss Philura hesitated for a moment. "I haven't exactly

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had money left me," she began; then her eyes brightened. "I have all that I need," she said, and straightened her small figure confidently.

"And *are* you going to be married, dear?"

"Yes," said Miss Philura distinctly.

"Well, I *never*—Philura Rice!" almost screamed her companion. "Do tell me *when;* and *who* is it?"

"I can not tell you that—now," said Miss Philura simply. "He is in ——" She was

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about to add "the encircling Good," but she reflected that Miss Pratt might fail to comprehend her. "I will introduce you to him — later," she concluded with dignity.

To follow the fortunes of Miss Philura during the ensuing weeks were a pleasant though monotonous task; the encircling Good proved itself wholly adequate to the demands made upon it. Though there was little money in the worn purse, there were numerous and pressing invitations to

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tea, to dinner, and to spend the day, from hosts of friends who had suddenly become warm, affectionate, and cordially appreciative; and not even the new Methodist minister's wife could boast of such lavish donations, in the shape of new-laid eggs, frosted cakes, delicate biscuit, toothsome crullers and choice fruits as found their way to Miss Philura's door.

The recipient of these manifold favors walked, as it were,

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upon air. "For unto every one that hath shall be given," she read in the privacy of her own shabby little parlor, "and he shall have abundance."

"Everything that I want is mine!" cried the little lady, bedewing the pages of Holy Writ with happy tears. The thought of the lover and husband who, it is true, yet lingered in the invisible, brought a becoming blush to her cheek. "I shall see him soon," she reflected tranquilly. "He is mine—mine!"

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At that very moment Miss Electa Pratt was seated in the awe-inspiring reception-room of Mrs. J. Mortimer Van Deuser's residence in Beacon Street. The two ladies were engaged in earnest conversation.

"What you tell me with regard to Philura fills me with surprise and alarm," Mrs. Van Deuser was remarking with something more than her accustomed majesty of tone and

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mien. "Philura Rice certainly did *not* become engaged to be married during her stay in Boston. Neither has she been the recipient of funds from myself, nor, to the best of my knowledge, from any other member of the family. Personally, I have always been averse to the encouragement of extravagance and vanity in those destined by a wise Providence to pass their lives in a humble station. I fear exceedingly that Philura's visits to Boston have failed to bene-

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fit her as I wished and intended."

"But she *said* that she had money, and that she was going to get married," persisted Miss Pratt. "You don't suppose" —lowering her strident tones to a whisper—"that the poor thing is going crazy?"

Mrs. Van Deuser had concentrated her intellectual and penetrating orbs upon a certain triangular knob that garnished the handle of her

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visitor's umbrella; she vouchsafed no reply. When she did speak, after the lapse of some moments, it was to dismiss that worthy person with a practiced ease and adroitness which permitted of nothing further, either in the way of information or conjecture.

"Philura is, after all, a distant relative of my own," soliloquized Mrs. Van Deuser, "and *as such* is entitled to consideration."

Her subsequent cogitations

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presently took shape to themselves and became a letter, dispatched in the evening mail and bearing the address of the Rev. Silas Pettibone, Innisfield. Mrs. Van Deuser recalled in this missive Miss Philura's "unfortunate visit" to the Ontological Club, and the patent indications of its equally unfortunate consequences. "I should be inclined to take myself severely to task in the matter," wrote the excellent and conscientious lady, "if I had not improved the oppor-

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tunity to explain at length, in the hearing of my misguided relative, the nature and scope of God's controlling providence, as signally displayed in His dealings with the humbler classes of society. As an undershepherd of the lowly flock to which Miss Rice belongs, my dear Mr. Pettibone, I lay her spiritual state before you, and beg that you will at once endeavor to set right her erroneous views of the overruling guidance of the Supreme Being. I shall myself intercede for

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Philura before the Throne of Grace."

The Rev. Silas Pettibone read this remarkable communication with interest; indeed, after returning it to its envelope and bestowing it in his most inaccessible coat-pocket, the under-shepherd of the lowly flock of Innisfield gave himself the task of resurrecting and reperusing the succinct yet weighty words of Mrs. Van Deuser.

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If the Rev. Silas had been blessed with a wife, to whose nimbler wits he might have submitted the case, it is probable that he would not have sat for so long a time in his great chair brooding over the contents of the violet-tinted envelope from Boston. But unfortunately the good minister had been forced to lay his helpmate beneath the rough sods of the village churchyard some three years previous. Since this sad event, it is scarcely necessary to state, he

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had found it essential to his peace of mind to employ great discretion in his dealings with the female members of his flock. He viewed the matter in hand with vague misgivings. Strangely enough, he had not heard of Miss Philura's good fortune, and to his masculine and impartial vision there had appeared no especial change in the aspect or conduct of the the little woman.

"Let me think," he mused, passing his white hand through the thick, dark locks, just

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touched with gray, which shaded his perplexed forehead. He was a personable man, was the Rev. Silas Pettibone. "Let me think: Miss Philura has been very regular in her attendance at church and prayer-meeting of late. No, I have observed nothing wrong — nothing blameworthy in her walk and conversation. But I can not approve of these — ah — clubs." He again cast his eye upon the letter. "Ontology, now, is certainly not a fit subject for the

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consideration of the female mind."

Having delivered himself of this sapient opinion, the reverend gentleman made ready for a round of parochial visits. Foremost on his list appeared the name of Miss Philura Rice. As he stood upon the door-step, shaded on either side by fragrant lilac plumes, he resolved to be particularly brief, though impressive, in his pas-

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toral ministrations. If this especial member of his flock had wandered from the straight and narrow way into forbidden by-paths, it was his manifest duty to restore her in the spirit of meekness; but he would waste no unnecessary time or words in the process.

The sunshine, pleasantly interrupted by snowy muslin curtains, streamed in through the open windows of Miss Philura's modest parlor, kindling into scarlet flame the blossoms of the thrifty gera-

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nium which stood upon the sill, and flickered gently on the brown head of the little mistress of the house, seated with her sewing in a favorite rocking-chair. Miss Philura was unaffectedly glad to see her pastor. She told him at once that last Sunday's sermon was inspiring; that she felt sure that after hearing it the unconverted could hardly fail to be convinced of the error of their ways.

The Rev. Silas Pettibone seated himself opposite Miss

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Philura and regarded her attentively. The second-best new dress was undeniably becoming; the blue eyes under the childish brows beamed upon him cordially. "I am pleased to learn — ah — that you can approve the discourse of Sabbath morning," he began in somewhat labored fashion. "I have had occasion to — that is — er, my attention has been called of late to the fact that certain members of the church have — well, to put it briefly, some have

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fallen grievously away from the faith."

Miss Philura's sympathy and concern were at once apparent. "I do not see," she said simply, "how one can fall away from the faith. It is so beautiful to believe!"

The small, upturned face shone with so sweet and serene a light that the under-shepherd of the Innisfield flock leaned forward and fixed his earnest brown eyes on the clear blue

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eyes of the lady. In treatises relating to the affections this stage of the proceedings is generally conceded to mark a crisis. It marked a crisis on this occasion; during that moment the Rev. Silas Pettibone forgot at once and for all time the violet-tinted envelope in his coat-tail pocket. It was discovered six month's later and consigned to oblivion by — but let us not anticipate.

"God is so kind, *so generous!*" pursued Miss Philura softly. "If we once know Him as our

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Father we can never again be afraid, or lonely, or poor, or lacking for any good thing. How is it possible to fall away? I do not understand. Is it not because they do not know Him?"

It is altogether likely that the pastor of the Innisfield Presbyterian Church found conditions in the spiritual state of Miss Philura which necessitated earnest and prolonged admonition; at all events, the sun was sinking behind the western horizon when the reverend gentleman

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slowly and thoughtfully made his way toward the parsonage. Curiously enough, this highly respectable domicile had taken on during his absence an aspect of gloom and loneliness unpleasantly apparent. "A scarlet geranium in the window might improve it," thought the vaguely dissatisfied proprietor, as he put on his dressing-gown and thrust his feet into his newest pair of slippers. (Presented by Miss Electa Pratt "to my pastor, with grateful affection.")

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"I believe I failed to draw Miss Philura's attention to the obvious relation between faith and works," cogitated the reverend Silas, as he sat before his lonely hearth, placidly scorching the soles of his new slippers before the cheerful blaze. "It will be altogether advisable, I think, to set her right on that point without delay. I will—ah—just look in again for a moment to-morrow afternoon."

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"God's purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour.
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower!"

sang the choir of the Innisfield Presbyterian Church one Sunday morning a month later. And Miss Philura Rice—as was afterward remarked—sang the words with such enthusiasm and earnestness that her high soprano soared quite above all the other voices in the choir, and this despite the fact that Miss Electa Pratt was putting forth her nasal contralto with more than wonted insistence.

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The last-mentioned lady found the sermon—on the text, "Little children, love one another, for love is of God"—so extremely convincing, and her own subsequent spiritual state in such an agitated condition, that she took occasion to seek a private conversation with her pastor in his study on that same Sunday afternoon.

"I don't know *when* I've been so wrought up!" declared Miss Pratt, with a preliminary display of immaculate handkerchief. "I cried *and*

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cried after I got home from church this morning. Ma she sez to me, sez she, 'What ails you Lecty?' And I sez to ma, sez I, 'Ma, it was that *blessed* sermon. I don't know *when* I ever heard anything like it! That dear pastor of ours is just ripening for a better world!'" Miss Electa paused a moment to shed copious tears over this statement. "It does seem to me, *dear* Mr. Pettibone," she resumed, with a tender glance and a comprehensive sniff, "that you ain't

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looking as well as usual. I said so to Philura Rice as we was coming out of church, and I really hate to tell you how she answered me; only I feel as though it was my duty. 'Mr. Pettibone is perfectly well!' she says, and tossed those feathers of hers higher'n ever. Philura's awful worldly, I *do grieve* to say—*if not worse.* I've been a-thinking for some time that it was my Christian duty (however painful) to tell you what Mis' Van Deuser, of Boston, said about——"

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The Rev. Silas Pettibone frowned with awful dignity. He brought down his closed fist upon his open Bible with forensic force and suddenness. "Miss Philura Rice," he said emphatically, "is one of the most spiritual — the most lovely and consistent — Christian characters it has ever been my privilege to know. Her faith and unworldliness are absolutely beyond the comprehension of — of — many of my flock. I must further tell you that I hope to have the great happi-

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ness of leading Miss Rice to the matrimonial altar in the near future."

Miss Electa Pratt sank back in her chair petrified with astonishment. "Well, I *must say!*" she gasped. "And she was engaged to you *all this time* and I never knew it!"

The Rev. Pettibone bent his eyes coldly upon his agitated parishioner. "I am at a loss to comprehend your very strange comment, Miss Pratt," he said; "the engagement has

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been of such very short duration that I can not regard it as surprising that you should not have heard of it. It—ah—took place only yesterday."

Miss Electa straightened her angular shoulders with a jerk. "Yesterday!" she almost screamed. "Well! I can tell *you* that Philura Rice told *me* that she was engaged to be married more than three months ago!"

"You are certainly mistaken, madam," began the minister

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in a somewhat perturbed tone, which did not escape the notice of the now flushed and triumphant spinster.

"More than three months ago!" she repeated with incisive emphasis. "*Now* maybe you'll listen to me while I tell you what I know about Philura Rice!"

But the lady had reckoned without her host. The Rev. Silas arose to his feet with decision. "I certainly will *not* listen to anything derogatory to Miss Rice," he said sternly.

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"She is my promised wife, you will remember." With that the prudent minister beat a hasty retreat, to entrench himself without apology or delay in the inner fastnesses of the parsonage.

Miss Electa rolled her greenish orbs about the chamber of learning with a thoughtful smile. "If Philura Rice ain't crazy," she said aloud; "an' I guess she ain't far from it. She's told a wicked lie! In

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either case, it's my Christian duty to see this thing put a stop to!"

That evening after service Miss Philura, her modest cheeks dyed with painful blushes, confessed to her promised husband that she had indeed announced her intentions of matrimony some three months previous. "I wanted somebody to—to love me," she faltered; "somebody in particular, you know; and—and I asked God to give me—a—a husband. After I had

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asked, of course I *believed* that *I had.* He—he was already in the encircling Good, you know, or I should not have wanted him! When Electa asked me point blank, what could I say without—without denying—*God?*"

The brave voice faltered more than once during this recital; and finally broke down altogether when the Rev. Silas Pettibone, his brown eyes shining, exclaimed in joyful yet solemn tones, "and God sent me!"

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The encircling Good was perfectly manifest at that moment in the shape of two strong arms. Miss Philura rested in them and was glad.

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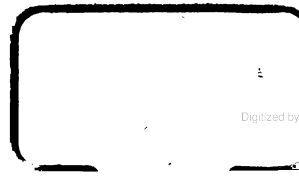
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